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BEHIND THE ENEMY'S LINES



BY ALBERT CLIFF SPROUL

DAVID C. COOK PUBLISHING CO., ELGIN, ILL.

Behind the Enemy's Lines

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By *ALBERT CLIFF SPROUL*



Published By
DAVID C. COOK PUBLISHING COMPANY
Elgin Chicago New York Boston
Publishing House and Mailing Rooms, Elgin, Illinois.

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Behind the Enemy's Lines

By *ALBERT CLIFF SPROUL*

CHAPTER ONE.

THEY have crossed the border!" The speaker leaned from the tonneau of the high-powered racing car to call to the aged innkeeper.

"And when will they be here?"

"In about three hours. Prepare, for we are relying upon you."

The car continued its flight down the winding road into the valley, while the innkeeper stood in the doorway and wrung his hands. "Pierre," he called finally. "Pierre."

A boy about sixteen years of age came from the rear of the building. "The time has come," the old man whispered. "The enemy has invaded our country. Are you brave enough to do your part?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"If you are found out, it means death for both of us."

"I shall do my best."

"We must lose no time, yet we must be cautious. I fear there are traitors about. Take the mare and ride through the village into the woods and tie her there. Then steal back on foot. I shall have everything ready."

Pierre followed instructions, and making a detour through the woods, he completely encompassed the west side of the village and came up behind the inn. Prone upon the ground, at the fringe of the forest, he "cawed" noisily three times.

A few moments later, a lower window of the inn, on the side fronting the woods, opened and a red tablecloth was laid on the sill.

Pierre knew now that the coast was clear. He rose from the ground and stole quickly across the open stretch to the stone stable. Skirting this, he glided hastily into the inn.

"Make haste!" his grandfather commanded excitedly. "Refugees from the border towns are drawing near. They will soon pass the inn."

Pierre walked to the huge fireplace. All the preparations had been made for starting a fire and the kindling and logs awaited but the touch of a match. Leaning over, he pressed on a hidden spring. A part of the back of the fireplace opened like a door.

"Everything is in there," the innkeeper said; "food, water, everything. Be brave, my boy. It is for our country. Hurry!"

A moment later, Pierre had closed the door behind him and stood in utter darkness. He heard his grandfather cross the inn floor and start the fire. The chill of an early fall required heated rooms. The time for which they had prepared so long had come at last. War, which had hovered darkly over them, had broken out. A ruthless enemy, that had brandished weapons and hurled menaces for so long a time, was pouring into their beloved land. It had been the prophecy of the War Office that the enemy would make their first stand along this valley. Accordingly, the inn had been secretly reconstructed so that it could be used as an outpost when the enemy had invaded the country. It would be most advantageous to have some one behind the enemy's lines to assist the gunners in the fort in finding the proper range, and the important part had fallen to the lot of Pierre, as one of the least liable to be suspected.

Feeling his way ahead, Pierre came to the narrow, winding staircase that led to the platform above. The immense chimney in the rear of the inn was, in reality, a chimney within a chimney. The two compartments had been separated by a

double wall, within which there was a vacuum that prevented the heat of the inner chimney from making the temperature of the outer one unendurable. Above, all had been so clever-



Pierre knew now that the coast was clear.

ly joined that no one would suspect the existence of the secret. Step by step, Pierre made his way up the staircase.

At last he reached the platform that ran around the interior of the outer chimney. Cunningly arranged peepholes in the

stone walls enabled him to get a view of the country in all directions. Pierre groped along one of the walls until his hand came in contact with a coil of insulated wire. Unwinding it, he felt for the end, and pressed the button which he found there, encased in a wooden holder. Three times he did that. Then he waited. At length a faint bluish light appeared in a small bulb on the wall. "Good," murmured Pierre. "They know now that I am ready."

He hung the wire on the hook again and gazed out of one of the openings in the chimney. Refugees were hurrying along the road that led to the city. After the few stragglers who brought up the rear had passed the inn, an ominous silence fell. His eyes fixed on the hole in the chimney and his pulse throbbing violently, Pierre awaited the coming of the enemy. Suddenly a solitary horseman hove into sight, directly followed by another. Others, irregularly grouped, came after them. These were followed by many more, all moving ahead at a deliberate pace. They were the cavalry scouts trying to get knowledge of the other forces. As nothing happened, they proceeded on their way toward the valley. The khaki-clad infantry followed. Pierre was aghast at their numbers.

Stealing to the opposite side of his chimney shelter, he saw that the predictions of the War Office were correct. The enemy had decided to make the valley their base from which to proceed against and capture the city. The inn was filled with a noisy crowd that gutturally demanded of the innkeeper his best. Pierre heard his grandfather, in a temporary lull, try to placate his unwelcome guests.

In the meantime, daylight had faded to dusk. Pierre, tired from his vigil, and realizing that he could do nothing further that night, tiptoed to the staircase. The felt slippers that covered his shoes muffled the sounds of his steps. He descended to the bottom of the chimney and felt his way to a chest that stood in the corner. As he raised the lid a small light was mechanically flashed on within the container. Here was stored everything that was essential to his stay in the

hidden chamber. There were many boxes of prepared, imperishable rations. Liquids were contained in tight tanks with faucets attached. A small electric stove supplied the heat that Pierre required. Blankets and a felt mattress lay to one side of the chest.

After preparing and eating a hasty meal, Pierre took one of the blankets and ascended the winding staircase. On reaching the platform, he opened a small air hole near the top of the chimney, spread his blanket on the platform, and sat down to rest in preparation for his trying work of the next day.

All at once the hubbub in the inn was silenced. "Clear out of here," a voice commanded in the foreign tongue which Pierre understood, "every one of you." A scuffling of feet into the road followed. The soldiers were evidently leaving the inn.

"And with what may I serve you?" Pierre heard his grandfather ask, in humble tones.

"With your absence."

"You mean, sir?"

"I want everybody in the place to clear out, *everybody*. Do you understand?"

"For good?"

"Yes. We are going to use this place for headquarters, so hurry up! Take your stuff and leave. The staff will be here in a few minutes."

Pierre started in amazement at what he heard. By a whimsical trick of fate, the hidden chamber was to serve two purposes: not only could he help the gunners of the fort to find the range, but he would be able to overhear the most intimate secrets of the enemy's army.

CHAPTER TWO.

PIERRE realized that the strange turn of events threw him entirely upon his own resources. In banishing his grandfather the enemy had forced away the only one in the vicinity who knew the secret of the inn.

Many foot-treads indicated the advent of the enemy. There was a scraping of many heavy objects over the wooden floor of the inn. Suddenly his grandfather's voice surmounted the din. "When may I come back?"

"When we get good and ready to let you, if there's anything left of the place when we get through with it. Be quick. I've no time to fool away with you."

"In that case"—the innkeeper spoke even louder—"I must go to the Circle."

Pierre caught the significance of his grandfather's words. He knew that they were intended for him; that the Circle, an opening about two miles back of the village, in the midst of the most dense part of the woods, was in some way to be a means of communication between them.

Five minutes later, the chugging of several automobiles in front of the inn indicated the arrival of the staff. "Is everything prepared?" boomed out a deep, authoritative voice.

"Almost everything, general. We are just finishing the installation of the telephones."

"Has the house been thoroughly searched?"

"Yes, general."

"You're certain there's no one around?"

"Yes, general."

"Then, place a guard about the building."

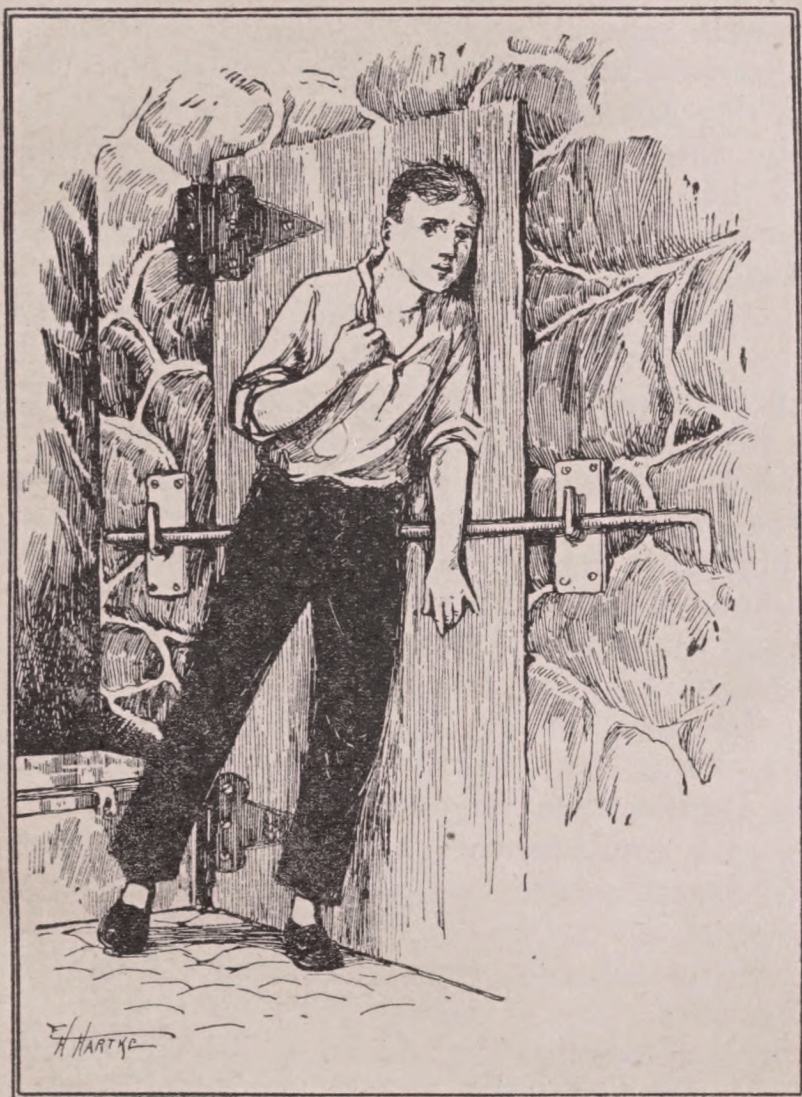
Pierre strained his ears for all the information he could get, but he heard little that was of value. Suddenly a strange voice broke into the conversation. "He is here, general," the man was saying, "awaiting your orders."

"Show him in. And be sure that no one sees him enter. I wish to keep his secret as long as possible."

After an interval, the soldier evidently returned, accom-

panied by another. "Well, Stegler"—Pierre knew that the general was speaking—"is everything ready?"

"Everything, general." The voice sounded strangely familiar to Pierre.



Pierre strained his ears for all the information he could get.

"Are the concrete emplacements all in good condition, ready for the big guns?"

"Yes, general."

"Did you name the hostages?"

"Yes, general."

"Good. Now, I want you to remain here for a while. I may have to use your knowledge of the country to perfect my plans of attack. Keep away from the windows."

"Very well, general."

Pierre racked his brains for the solution of the enigma. Who was the man who had pretended to be one of them? He must have employed some other name, for Pierre did not recognize the name "Stegler."

The general spoke again: "What have you done about your shop, Stegler?"

"Francois, my helper, is in charge." Suddenly Pierre knew it was Voisin, the barber. To think that he should be a spy!

"Go into one of the other rooms and wait there. I shall probably need you."

Pierre heard several men enter the room; then there was a scraping of many chair legs on the floor. He felt certain that an important session of some kind was to be held. The general, first of all, received reports from members of his staff. Then by means of the telephones in outlying stations, he learned of all the up-to-the-minute conditions. "What we must do now," he informed his staff, "is to get our big guns in action against the forts. It is useless to attempt to take the fortifications by assault or with lighter artillery. The concrete emplacements are ready. Here is the plan, showing where they are located. This one here is under the barber shop at the end of the village"—He continued to point out where the concrete foundations, necessary for the big guns, were built.

From the description and location, Pierre readily understood how thoroughly his countrymen had been deceived. Seemingly innocent projects of peace times were in reality preparations for war.

"We've got to advance before the enemy has an opportunity to mobilize completely. Once past these forts, the road to the capital ought to be fairly clear. We must get the big guns into action as speedily as we can. They are now moving

on a specially constructed railroad and ought to be here sometime to-morrow morning. In the meantime, see to it that the emplacements are bared, ready to receive the guns." With the consideration and disposal of a few less important plans, the conference broke up.

Feeling certain that nothing more of importance would be discussed, Pierre once more ascended the staircase and sat on the blanket which covered one side of the platform. The size of the chimney did not admit of his lying down. Relaxing as best he could, he fell asleep.

A stir and bustle in the inn awoke him next morning. Pierre arose stiffly and straightened out the kinks in his body. He revolved in his mind the plans which he had heard discussed by the enemy's staff. They were evidently relying upon the big guns to open up a way past the forts, and were basing all their hopes of speedy victory upon the success of the huge howitzers. If there were only some way in which he could prevent them from carrying out their plans! Suddenly he thought of the foundations which were to support the guns. If those concrete constructions were destroyed before the arrival of the huge artillery, the monster weapons would be useless, for the guns could not be fired without the proper base. It would require many days to rebuild the foundations and have the concrete hard enough to support the tremendous engines of destruction. The delay would be vital time lost for the enemy and a valuable respite for his hard-pressed countrymen.

Alive to the possibilities of his idea, he stole to a peephole and looked down into the valley. There he beheld minute splotches of white along the line and knew that they were the constructions that played so important a part in the enemy's plans. The moment had come for action. Pierre went to the coil of insulated wire, which communicated with a fort many miles away, unwound it, and grasped the wooden bulb at the end firmly in his right hand. He pressed the button six times in quick succession, waited an interval, and then repeated the operation. The blue bulb on the wall lighted up

and Pierre knew that those at the fort were awaiting the signal to fire. With a long, continued pressure on the button, he gave the signal to start firing. There was a wait of several minutes; then a shell shrieked over the intervening miles and exploded many rods in front of the nearest concrete emplacement.

A short pressure on the button told the gunners to take a longer range. The next shell burst beyond the concrete construction, and Pierre rang the bell twice. With those simple signals, Pierre was able to direct the course of the huge missiles. It was with grim satisfaction that he directed the firing of his countrymen toward one of the concrete emplacements. Suddenly a shell landed full upon one of the white splotches and blew the foundation to pieces.

CHAPTER THREE.

ONE after another, the gunners, assisted by Pierre, destroyed the concrete emplacements. When the fifth was shattered, there was a tremendous stamping in the inn. "Some one is giving them information," bellowed the enraged voice of the general. "That firing is too accurate. Some one is behind our lines directing it!"

"But where can he be?" questioned one of the staff.

"That's what we've got to find out in a hurry. Search all the houses in the village. Scour the woods round about. Send our aviators aloft to try to discover what method they are using to signal to the enemy."

Pierre trembled at the knowledge of how thoroughly the vicinity would be searched, and he turned once more to his task. In a comparatively short time, the shells of his countrymen shattered the sixth foundation.

An outburst of rage echoed through the room below. The general doubled the number of searching parties.

Pierre's sole desire now was to destroy the remaining foundations as rapidly as possible. From his perch in the chimney he could see practically all the emplacements that

stretched along the valley. The field glasses, which formed part of his equipment, helped him to locate the foundations at a distance. At the hole in the chimney, with the glasses in one hand and the wooden bulb in the other, he noted the falls of the different shells and signaled the results to the fort. One by one, the supports of the big guns were blown to pieces, each successful shot causing a tempest in the inn.

"I'll find that fellow, if I have to use the whole army," vowed the general. "Call Stegler."

Stegler soon reported at headquarters. "There's some one around here," the general snapped, "who is directing the enemy's fire. I want to know who it is."

"Yes, general."

"Don't stand there like a dummy. Do something!"

"But, but, what—" the spy began falteringly.

"To think that you've lived here for years and have allowed them to construct some sort of a signaling apparatus under your very nose! Bah! Account for every one of the civilian population—man, woman, and child. You have the names of every one who has a right to live here, haven't you?"

"Yes, General."

"Well, check them up as far as you can. There is no use for you to disguise yourself any longer. Come out into the open and round them up. Take as many soldiers as you want to help you!"

"Yes, General."

"And keep every one of them under guard until I give you word to the contrary."

But three emplacements at the other end of the valley remained. Pierre directed the fire of the forts upon them. Within an hour, the supports were demolished.

The work was hardly completed, when an automobile stopped at the inn. Some one entered the building. "The guns are a mile back in the woods, General," a strange voice announced. "What shall we do with them?"

"Leave them where they are."

"I beg your pardon," the astounded courier faltered.

"They're worthless to us now," growled the general. "The enemy has destroyed every one of our emplacements, and it will take days to replace them. Meanwhile, keep the guns outside of the enemy's fire."

The general then boomed orders over the telephones, setting in action the various hidden batteries. "We'll see what effect lighter guns will have on the forts," he commented.

Pierre immediately scented new work. He tried to penetrate the leafy screen of foliage back of the village. The speeding missiles gave him an approximate idea of where some of the batteries were concealed, and he directed the fire of the forts toward them.

"The aviators signal that the guns have practically no effect on the forts," declared a new arrival at headquarters.

"I feared so," stated the general gloomily. "They were ready for those guns, but they did not suspect the existence of the bigger ones. There is no alternative left for us but to intrench. By the time we are ready to use the big weapons, the enemy will have completely mobilized and will advance against us. Give orders to dig the trenches at once."

The invader's batteries ceased firing, and Pierre, unable to locate them properly, signaled to the gunners of the forts to stop. Now, for the first time since early morning, he had a respite from the terrible strain and sank down upon the platform. Then, groping his way carefully down the staircase, he went to the box in the corner and took out one of the small containers of food, the first he had eaten that day. He painstakingly prepared his meal, making the least possible noise. When only partly through eating, he heard Stegler's voice in the inn. "They're all in the square under guard," the spy informed the commanding officer.

"There's nobody there who doesn't belong there?"

"No, General."

"You didn't see anything suspicious?"

"No, General."

"Is there any one whose absence might indicate him to be the guilty one?"

There was a pause. "No-o," replied the spy finally.

"You're as blind as a bat," declared the general impatient-



"They've cut the wires," he murmured dejectedly.

ly, as he pounded on the table. "We must find him!"

Hurried footsteps broke in upon their conversation. "We've discovered the secret, General," exclaimed one of the newcomers.

"What is it?"

"The —th regiment was intrenching according to orders a quarter of a mile below the inn. One of the soldiers came upon some wires running in the direction of the forts. We have every reason to suppose that the wires come from somewhere in the neighborhood of this inn."

The general spoke gravely. "That's impossible. There are no buildings about the inn except the stable. Both places have been thoroughly searched. But we can soon find out. Dig up the wires on this side. Put as many men as you possibly can at the work."

Trembling, Pierre placed the food, which he had held in his hand, into the container. He staggered from his seat on the edge of the box and felt his way again up the winding staircase. Seizing the wooden bulb at the end of the insulated wire, he pressed the button six times in succession, waited for a short time, and then repeated the process. Again and again, he tried to ring the bell at the fort. The glass bulb on the wall remained dark. "They've cut the wires," he murmured dejectedly.

He hung up the coil and went from one peephole to another in an effort to gain information. Suddenly he heard the sounds of pickaxes in the vicinity. Hastening to the peephole that fronted the forts, he saw a line of soldiers emerging from the forest. They were digging up the wires! Pierre watched them draw nearer and nearer the building. At last they reached the place where the wires entered it.

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE guard about the building and stable was doubled, each soldier with his gun loaded and ready for use.

Pierre heard the general detail the squads to search various parts of the building. "Pull down what partitions you can. The man is around here somewhere and must be found. And"—he had evidently turned to one of his staff—"tell Stegler to bring that rascally old innkeeper here."

"We can't follow the wires any farther, without ripping the building to pieces, General," said a newcomer; "they're imbedded so in the masonry."

"Wait awhile, then. We can undoubtedly get at him in some other way. Ah, there you are, Stegler. Where's the innkeeper?"

"I couldn't find him, sir."

"Couldn't find him!"

An immense load was lifted from Pierre's heart. The fear that his grandfather would be hauled before the military tribunal, sentenced, and led out to execution, was lessened with the knowledge that he was not yet a prisoner.

"I'll wager it's the old rascal himself who has done the mischief. Who lived in the place with him?"

"There was Marie, his daughter, who waited on the table."

"Where is she?"

"She left a few days ago for a visit to the capital."

"Who else was in the place?"

"Henri, the chef."

"Have you got him under guard?"

"No, General."

"Why not? Couldn't you find him, either?"

"He is one of my assistants."

"Do you mean to say that he worked in this inn day after day and never found out the secret? He is surely a fit assistant for a man like you; the blind leading the blind!"

"Then there was Pierre."

"What did he do?"

"He was a boy of all work."

"Where is he?"

"I saw him riding out of the village a few hours before you came."

"Hum! Not much light here. Go out and try to catch the old innkeeper. Spread a hue and cry about. If you see the boy, bring him in."

One squad after another returned to the large lower room and reported failure to the general.

"I tell you," shouted the commander, "he must be somewhere around here."

"Well, there's the chimney. Perhaps he's in there."

"What do you think he is?" ejaculated the general, "A salamander? There's been a fire in that fireplace all day. No human being could live in that heat for one hour, much less twenty-four."

"I looked over the chimney, General," volunteered one of those present, "both in the cellar and outside, and I couldn't find any cracks or openings that would indicate an entrance."

"We can't spend any more time on this problem," decided the general emphatically. "We'll move headquarters and blow this inn to atoms. That will settle everything."

The slight hope that had sprung up in Pierre vanished utterly. The general's course of action would indeed settle everything.

"Clear our things out," the general ordered those about him, "and one of you take charge of blowing up the place."

The confusion gradually diminished as the rooms below were emptied of their furnishings. Pierre gazed out of the peepholes in the chimney and saw that a multitude of guards encircled the two buildings. He descended the staircase and approached the massive door that led into the fireplace. Releasing the locking bar, he swung the door partly open by means of a rod that had been placed in the hidden chamber for that purpose. A blast of heat smote him full in the face, and made him stagger back. In a short time, however, he grew accustomed to the flames and once more drew near the opening. Bending down, he looked over the blazing logs into the room. A pile of papers lay heaped together near the fire. He thrust his rod through the flames and pulled over several of the papers. They instantly flared up. Then pushing them back, he ignited a heap of waste and shut the secret door back of the fireplace. With thumping heart, he awaited the result of his desperate act.

For a minute or two, he heard nothing. Then there was a rush of feet. "Who set that fire?" cried one in authority.

"The place was to be blown up, not burned." The noise of stamping and beating told Pierre of the frantic attempts the soldiers were making to put out the flames, and then came



He thrust his rod through the flames and pulled over several of the papers.

the voice of the staff officer, gasping out the command:
"Get out, men; it's too late."

Pierre mounted the staircase again. Fortunately, a rather

strong wind blew the smoke and flames away from the chimney, so that there was no danger of his suffocating. Beyond a great increase in temperature, due to the heating of the thick stone partition that separated the chimney from the house proper, the imprisoned boy did not suffer in any way, thanks to the vacuum walls.

The invading soldiers completely encircled the house and the barn, momentarily expecting that the spy would be forced from his hiding place. Soon the entire inn was wrapped in flames, which the wind, increasing in strength, blew away from the chimney. The heat, however, finally forced Pierre to descend to the bottom of the hidden chamber. There, clinging to the furthestmost wall with a moistened blanket about him, he awaited the entire destruction of the inn.

When he finally dared to leave his post, it was night. The flames had died away and the spectators, baffled at the nonappearance of the enemy, had left the vicinity, convinced that their reasoning was wrong or that the spy had perished in the flames. From the peepholes, he could see, in the bright moonlight, that little remained of the inn. Rescued from death almost by a miracle, he knelt on the platform and voiced his thanks to the God who had watched over him. Then he leaned against the rough stone and fell asleep.

The sun was high in the heavens when Pierre awoke next day. He descended to the bottom of the chimney and ate some food. Then he sat down upon the chest to plan his next step. The enemy were all about the chimney and the chances that he would successfully elude them, were decidedly against him. Fortunately, there were provisions and water enough in the hidden chamber to last him two weeks. He could stay in the chimney with comparative safety that length of time, unless a shell from one of his countrymen's guns shattered the structure. But after that, hunger and thirst would force him out of his hiding place to run great risks. He decided it would be far better to make the attempt when he could take part of the provisions with him. He determined,

therefore, to wait until the ruins had thoroughly cooled and the attention of the invaders was diverted from the place. Then, he would choose a dark night.

During the day, he made a haversack in which, to carry water and food.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE next two days were bright and sunshiny, with moonlit nights. The third day was dark and lowering, and gave promise of just the kind of night for which Pierre was waiting. In accordance with his hopes, the night was pitch dark. Having completed his preparations, Pierre swung the door open a little and gazed outside. Fortunately, none of the fallen walls would prevent him from leaving the chimney. He could see nothing except a faint glimmer from the darkened lights of automobile transports which passed along the road. Drawing a deep breath to fortify him, he opened the door wide, then closed it to prevent his secret from becoming known to the enemy. Perhaps he might need the shelter of the chimney again before he could join his countrymen. A line of trucks came by, but he crouched behind the fragment of a wall until they had passed. Then he stumbled across the road, and reaching the woods that flanked it, he threw himself flat on the ground to avoid being seen by the occupants of a high-powered car that whizzed past.

It was Pierre's intention to cover, during the night, as much as possible of the two miles that lay between him and the Circle which his grandfather had mentioned in the inn. He went at right-angles to the road, which he located by the passing lights, until it finally disappeared behind the massed foliage. Then, fearful of losing his bearings and wandering into the hands of the enemy, he realized that it was a hopeless proposition to go farther. He had to wait for daybreak. He wormed his way into the center of a clump of bushes and lay down to rest. The damp chill of the night prevented him from sleeping, and he was forced to stand erect and thrash his arms about to keep warm.

As soon as he could make out his surroundings, he started again on his way to the Circle. He stole from tree to tree, from one clump of bushes to another, alert for signs of the enemy. He knew that the woods stretched back of the road fully fifteen miles. For the most part, it consisted of huge trees, surrounded by a tangle of undergrowth. Stealthily working along through this growth, he finally reached his goal about the middle of the morning. Huge oaks and pines stood in a circle about an enclosure approximately one hundred feet in diameter. By some freak of nature, not a tree had grown within the Circle, with the exception of a solitary pine in the center, which towered even higher than the giants surrounding it.

Pierre was about to enter the open space, when he drew back. "I wonder," he murmured to himself, "if there is any one here, watching. That officer might have told the general of what grandfather said before he left the inn—that he would have to go to the Circle. Every one in the village knows this place by that name, even Voisin—or Stegler, as they called him. The enemy may be trying to trap grandfather here." The thought redoubled his caution. Concealed by dense undergrowth about twin oaks, Pierre determined to remain where he was, until he had an opportunity to reconnoiter without fear of discovery. He took some food from the haversack and ate it, after which he drank from the can of water. Emboldened by the continued silence, he was going to step forward, when a strange sight caused him to pause. Perhaps seventy-five feet away, a bird was about to alight on a branch not far from the ground, when it checked its flight and flew away with cries of fear. "That's peculiar," muttered Pierre. "There's something over there that frightened the bird."

He riveted his gaze to the spot, but he could not see anything out of the ordinary. "Well," he finally decided, as he stooped once more behind his leafy screen, "I'm not going to take any chances." Hour after hour passed and the situation remained unchanged. But as dusk came on, Pierre

heard a rustling that was not caused by the wind. It grew louder and was accompanied by the cautious treading of feet.



Scooping it up rapidly he came to a piece of paper.

"He won't come now," said some one near by, in a low tone.

"He has probably been here and gone," said another, whose voice Pierre recognized as Stegler's. "There isn't much use

watching any longer. He probably knows by this time that the inn has been burned to the ground and on that account, won't hang around this place any more." The sound began to die away. The men evidently had taken another direction and were going away from him. In order not to waste any more of the waning light, Pierre stole through the bushes out into the enclosure.

He felt certain that his grandfather would leave some message, if he could not be present. The question was, where had he hidden the note? A solitary pine that stood in the center of the Circle attracted his attention. Pierre felt convinced that his grandfather would secrete his communication here. Dropping on his hands and knees, he began to search carefully around the base of the tree. On the west side, he discerned traces of recently disturbed soil. Scooping it up rapidly he came to a piece of paper. He smoothed out the wrinkled folds and turned it to the light. Seemingly it bore his grandfather's handwriting. "I shall be in the gully near the blasted oak," the note ran, "for the next week. Come, if you can. When it is daylight, I shall see you."

It was now quite dark. Pierre resolved to camp near the Circle until morning, and make for the gully at daybreak. He gathered together a number of boughs that lay on the ground and stripped the evergreen trees round about of others. These he used as a bed and covering. Utterly exhausted, he fell asleep.

Early the following morning, he started toward the gully. Exercising every possible precaution he forced his way through the forest growth. At last he reached the place designated by his grandfather. The gully was directly ahead and along it, a trifle to the left, was the blasted oak. Making a hasty survey of his surroundings, Pierre pressed eagerly on toward the landmark. On reaching it, he stopped and waited impatiently. The morning was now well advanced and Pierre expected a quick response to his visit. As no one appeared, he "cawed" three times, and immediately a figure stepped out from behind neighboring bushes. It was Stegler, the spy!

Pierre knew then that he had walked into a trap; that the note at the base of the pine was either a forgery, placed there by Stegler, or had really been written by his grandfather, found and left there to ensnare any one who might come along.

"Why," exclaimed Stegler in mock surprise, "it's Pierre! Where have you been and what are you doing here?"

CHAPTER SIX.

PIERRE was at first tempted to run. He instinctively felt, however, that the trap was well guarded by the soldiers of the enemy. So he veiled his feelings, and turned to Stegler with a feigned look of pleasurable surprise. "Oh, Voisin," he exclaimed, calling the spy by the name with which the village folk had addressed him, "I thought it was one of the enemy's soldiers." He managed to inject such a relieved expression into his words that Stegler paused, a look of mystification spreading over his face.

"What's the trouble?" questioned the spy.

"I was looking for grandfather here. There's something big afoot." Pierre knew it would be useless to pretend to be entirely innocent. His presence and actions at the blasted oak showed clearly that he had discovered the note concealed at the base of the solitary pine in the Circle, and that he, or some one else who had communicated the information to him, was present at the inn, when his grandfather had remarked about the Circle. The only way to ward off capture for the time being, he concluded, was to hint at greater prey than himself. By suggesting a general conspiracy against the invading army, he would impel Stegler to delay his arrest until the spy could learn all the details of the new plot.

"Is that so?" questioned Stegler in frank astonishment.

"Are you sure no one can hear us?" questioned Pierre.

"Who could hear us way out here?" parried the spy.

"They sent me to get grandfather and try to persuade him to take part," Pierre hinted at his information.

"In what?" asked the other eagerly.

"I'm not allowed to say. But"—Pierre stopped, as though a new possibility had flashed through his mind—"why can't you join us?"

"To do what?"

"To collect and give information to our countrymen."

"Ah!" A gleam of satisfaction stole into Stegler's eyes. Pierre knew what was going on in his mind—a grasping at the possibility of acquiring new honors at the expense of his neighbors. "Is your grandfather here?" he questioned.

"He said he would be here for a week."

"When did he tell you that?"

Pierre saw the trap in a minute. If he deviated from the truth one iota, the spy would brand the whole story as a falsehood. "He didn't tell me."

"How did you know, then?"

"By a note which he left in a secret hiding place. Have you been around here very long?"

"Not very long."

"And you haven't seen grandfather anywhere?"

"No. I wish I had."

"I wonder where he is," remarked Pierre. "Perhaps we had better look for him." He started off, but Stegler stopped him. "It's too dangerous to go walking around like that," he cautioned. "The soldiers are looking for you."

"For me!" Pierre assumed a most astonished air.

"Why have you been away?"

"I went away before the enemy came," Pierre said in a tone which implied that he had just returned.

"Then who is getting up this conspiracy?" queried Stegler, with sudden suspicion.

Pierre mentioned the names of several whom he knew were in the forts.

"Are they around here? I thought they had reported at the fortifications. That clears up much." And the spy nodded his head decisively. Pierre knew now that he had convinced him of the fact that an important conspiracy was

being hatched, unknown to the invaders. "I believe I will join," declared Stegler, as though he gave his assent after weighing everything carefully. "Where are the meetings held?"

"I'll go with you myself to the place, just as soon as I can find grandfather."



He leaped forward and gave Stegler a violent push

"You'd better come back again. It wouldn't do to stay around this place too long. If your grandfather was here now, he would come out of his hiding place."

"All right," agreed Pierre with seeming reluctance. "It's funny, though, where he is."

The two started off toward the village. Pierre, with elaborate pretense, observed all his previous precautions, dodging here and there and working his way carefully along. Stegler played his part with all the seriousness of an actual conspirator. After progressing for some time in this fashion, they came to a steep bank. Reaching the top, Pierre was a little behind Stegler. He leaped forward and gave Stegler a violent push. Stegler lost his balance and rolled down the bank, shouting wildly.

Pierre darted through the woods. He knew that it would not be long before he was recaptured, unless he quickly secured a safe retreat. The spy would speedily set all the reserves back of the trenches at work scouring the forest and searching the houses. He was rapidly approaching one end of the village. Fortunately, he had not encountered any of the enemy.

Back of the main road, not far from the fringe of forest at which he had halted, was a small house of two stories with a little attic. Pierre recognized it as one in which Stegler lived.

The woods in which Pierre had taken refuge were seldom frequented by members of the hostile army. Were it not for Stegler, Pierre might have remained where he was with a fair degree of security. But he knew that the aroused spy would do his utmost to capture him. Crouched behind a massive tree, and expecting every moment to hear the alarm, he peered here and there for a refuge from those hunting him.

Suddenly he straightened up as a daring plan suggested itself. Why not take refuge in the spy's house? That surely would be the last place where they would think of looking for him! Ringing blows of an ax broke in upon his thoughts. Pierre went cautiously in the direction of the sounds. He

saw Jacques, the woodchopper, felling a tree. "Hist!" called Pierre from the sheltering bushes. The woodchopper stopped his work and looked around. "Hist!" Pierre parted the bushes and motioned with his hand.

Jacques dropped his ax and strode toward him. "Be careful," Jacques said; "they are searching for you."

"I know they are, so I want you to help me." In a few words, Pierre acquainted him with the facts.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Jacques.

"Have you your horse and cart here?"

"Yes. They're back a ways."

"Bring them here. Let me get into the cart. Cover me with boughs and drive past Stegler's house. When you get there, stop as though you had lost something. That will give me a chance to crawl out and enter the house."

"A good idea!" The woodchopper's eyes glowed appreciatively. Then a cloud of doubt covered his face. "Suppose it isn't open?"

"There's a window open, anyway. I can see it from here. Drive close past it. The load will hide me while I climb through."

Following the plan outlined, Jacques drove to Stegler's house and drew up close to the open window. Pierre, using the side of the cart as a perch, launched himself through the open window. Jacques, who had been pretending to examine the fetlock joint of one of the forelegs of the old horse, straightened up carelessly and clucked to the mare, who forged slowly ahead with the load.

The instant he was through the window, Pierre dodged out of sight behind one of the curtains. Then he listened for signs of life in the house. He knew that Stegler had lived alone with Francois, his helper, a man who was evidently one of the spy's assistants. Now, however, Pierre was not certain but what there were guests in the building. Hearing nothing, he tiptoed to the staircase that led to the upper story and mounted the steps. When he reached the top step,

he looked into the two rooms that led off the small hallway. Both were empty. The house was certainly deserted.

The building was small and afforded but few nooks in which he could hope to conceal himself. Looking up, Pierre spied the trapdoor that led to the attic. "The very place," he ejaculated.

In a short time, he had secured a chair and was standing on it, thrusting up the trapdoor. The aperture open, he started to hoist himself up when he paused. To leave the chair where it was would announce his presence to the occupants of the house. He descended once more to the lower story, where he secured a piece of board strong enough to bear his weight, and a length of stout rope. He ascended the staircase again, mounted the chair, and placed the board crosswise of the opening. Then he tied an end of the rope to the center of the board and, letting the rope fall free, he got down from the chair and returned it to its original position. In a few moments, he had pulled himself up by means of the rope, to the framework of the trapdoor, and had hoisted himself through the opening into the attic. It required but a short time to haul up the rope, remove the board from its position, and lower the trapdoor in place.

Once more Pierre's patience was tested by a seemingly interminable wait. From where he lay stretched over crossbeams, he could hear the booming of big howitzers, the crack-crack-crack of petulant rifle fire, and the automatic discharge of the machine guns. He knew that a big battle must be under way out near the trenches. Finally he heard the door below open and shut. The sound of muffled voices within the house came to his ears. Raising the trapdoor a trifle, he listened.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

THE general is as sore as a wet hen," said Stegler. "He gave me a grand dressing down, and then assigned me to a company as an ordinary private."

"What!" It was Francois' voice.

"He made me report to the quartermaster for an outfit. It's in this bundle. To-morrow I become a mere private. And all on account of allowing that young rascal to slip through my hands."

"Haven't you found any trace of him?"

"Not a sign."

"Did you find out where he came from?"

"Yes. And it was as cleverly arranged a place as you could wish, a heat-proof, hidden chamber in the chimney of the inn. We're watching that now. If he attempts to slip back there again, we're bound to catch him."

Pierre shuddered at his narrow escape. It had been his original intention to retreat to the chimney and, using that as a base of operations, make for the lines of his countrymen.

The firing, by this time, had died away to an occasional boom from one of the big guns. On the main road, Pierre heard constantly increasing activity. He knew that darkness had stolen over the country; that the enemy were rushing fresh men and supplies to the front trenches.

"I'm going to turn in," Stegler called.

"I've got to go on special duty," said Francois, "and probably won't be back to-night. Maybe I'll see you in the morning before you go," and he went out of the house, leaving Stegler getting a meal downstairs.

The meal over, Stegler ascended the staircase and entered one of the rooms off the hallway. Pierre heard the dropping of heavy shoes. Then absolute silence stole over the house.

Confronted with the necessity of devising a means of escape before he was starved out, Pierre weighed every possibility. He must start for the front as speedily as possible.

He thought of the uniform which Stegler had brought home with him. Why not dress himself in the garb of the enemy and, trailing along with the thousands of soldiers who were marching in the darkness toward the front, seek in some way to reach the other side?

For another hour, he waited in his hiding place to allow Stegler ample time to fall sound asleep. At last, the heavy breathing of the spy told him that the time for action had come. He opened the trapdoor cautiously, until it rested back against one of the crossbeams. Then he groped for the board that lay on a joist near by and, on finding it, paid out the rope carefully to the floor of the hallway. After he had laid the board in the proper position, he lowered himself through the opening and descended by means of the rope to the floor. He stole into the empty room, brought back a chair, and put it under the square hole. Mounting this he removed the board and closed the trapdoor. He returned the chair to the room from which he had taken it, wound up the rope, and, with the two objects tucked under his arm, descended the staircase.

Reaching the lower story, Pierre felt his way into the living room. Everything was so dark that a light was absolutely necessary. He drew the heavy shades at the windows and closed the door. Then he lit the lamp on the shelf above the fireplace. Turning down the wick so that there was only a faint glow, he placed the lamp on a chair around which he hung his coat. No one outside would notice the light, which sufficed, however, for his needs.

On a couch beside the window, Pierre spied the entire outfit that was to mark Stegler's entrance into the ranks as a private. He removed his outer garments and slipped into the uniform. Fortunately, he was of approximately the same height and build as the spy, so that the clothing proved to be a good fit. Shoes and leggings followed, plus all the other equipment, including a shrapnel helmet. Due to his inspection of a countless number of marching troops, Pierre knew on just what part of his person each article belonged. He bun-

dled his old clothes together and thrust them under the couch. Then he extinguished the lamp and placed it back on the shelf. Going to the front door, he opened it a crack. Off on the main road, he could dimly make out the passing vehicles and soldiers. He wanted an opportunity to join, unseen, a large body of them.

His chance came a short time later. A long train of what appeared to him to be motor ambulances forced a detachment of infantry off the road. The soldiers scattered to both sides and, with no apparent formation, marched ahead toward the trenches. Pierre slipped out of the house and joined them, unsuspected. It was not difficult to remain undetected, for each one had all he could do to keep out of the way of the interminable line of motor trucks, automobiles, artillery horses drawing guns and caissons, and speeding cars on special missions.

After a time, the soldiers left the road to enter the communication trenches that led to the ditches paralleling the trenches of the enemy. There was just room enough for the men entering to walk in single file, in order to give those retiring to rest camps a chance to get out. Stolidly Pierre followed the bulky form of the soldier ahead of him, farther and farther to the front. He realized that there was practically no opportunity to escape, until he reached the foremost trench.

At last the company to which Pierre had attached himself arrived at its destination. The officers had enjoined absolute silence upon the men, and this helped Pierre to keep his identity a secret. The fact that it was so dark that a soldier could not make out the features of his neighbor also protected the intruder from discovery, the disguise being further perfected by the spreading shrapnel helmet. Pierre tried to see, through an aperture in a heap of sand bags, signs of life in the trenches of his countrymen. The soldiers on both sides of him had disappeared into a "funk hole," which those who had been there before the present tenants had dug for greater protection. Pierre stood practically alone. He remained motionless at his post in a sentrylike attitude, until



"What are you going to do?" exclaimed a startled sentry.

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every man in the trench had settled down to the monotony of watching. After a long wait, Pierre laid his rifle against the wall of the trench, slipped off the more cumbersome parts of his equipment, and pulled himself out of the trench.

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed a startled sentry in a hoarse whisper.

"Ssh!" admonished Pierre sharply.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

THE sentry questioned him again, but Pierre paid no attention to him. He began to crawl under the wire entanglements. With his goal but a hundred yards distant, he was determined that nothing but a bullet would stop him. Soldiers often went out into No Man's Land during the night to rescue a wounded comrade, reconnoiter, or repair the barbed wire; so the disturbed sentinel was evidently at a loss to know what to do. Pierre took advantage of his confusion to squirm ahead over the sod which was pitted and hollowed by rifle and shell fire; and soon he was lost in the darkness.

Suddenly, as he twisted ahead, a brilliant light illumined the vicinity. It was one of the magnesium flares which the invaders had invented to prevent a surprise on a dark night. Pierre lay motionless upon the ground. As soon as the light went out, he scrambled madly ahead. He had not gone far when a second flare lighted up No Man's Land. He could see, directly in front of him, a yawning hole which a monster shell had blown in the earth. Again he simulated one of the prostrate forms that lay scattered about. He heard the cracking of rifles and realized that they were shooting in his direction, for in the ghastly white light he could see bullets kicking up dirt. All at once his right leg became limp. They had struck him! And then darkness settled once more.

But the shooting increased, for the soldiers on the other side began to answer. Pierre dragged himself forward and rolled down into the shell hole, just as the third flare came. The din increased in intensity.

Safe, for the time being, Pierre eased his wounded leg to as comfortable a position as possible, and waited for the tumult to cease. "Stegler must have guessed who took his uniform," he reasoned when some semblance of quiet had been restored; "else why should they have started to fire at me? He must have gone to headquarters and told the general, who telephoned to all the outlying trenches. It would be an easy matter to spot me."

A faint sound near at hand broke in upon his thoughts. There was some one else in the shell hole! Pierre was instantly alert. "Whoever he is," murmured Pierre with compassion, "he's wounded."

"Katharine!" The word was spoken in the guttural voice of the enemy. Pierre had no feeling of hostility, when he realized that the man was one of the invaders. He momentarily forgot his own wound. "Poor fellow," he muttered; "he's out of his head."

"Water! Water!" Without hesitating a moment longer, Pierre hitched himself in the direction whence the sound came. His wounded leg, jarred by the irregular jerking, tormented him cruelly. Presently his outstretched hand touched a recumbent form. He slipped his arm behind the shoulders of the man and placed his open canteen to his lips. The sufferer drank eagerly and Pierre laid him back again on the ground.

The rest of that night, Pierre listened to the mutterings of his comrade. When daylight came, the incoherent mutterings had died away. Pierre leaned over and felt of the man's heart. It was still beating. Evidently most of the fever had left him. He watched him intently until the first rays of the sun shone down on the scarred country. His companion sat up with a dazed expression on his face. "Where am I?" he asked.

Pierre answered him in the stranger's own tongue, explaining, as best he could, the predicament they were both in.

"And is it still night?"

"What?" Pierre said in astonishment.

"It is night," sighed the wounded invader, "for I cannot see a thing."

With infinite tact, Pierre broke the sad news to the man.

"Blind?" The stricken soldier rubbed his sightless eyes in despair. "Blind!"

After bandaging the wounds of his enemy as best he could and sharing his emergency rations and water, Pierre eased his own aching leg by bathing and tying it up. He had to wait now for a chance to crawl the rest of the way to the lines of his countrymen.

There was comparatively little action that day. Pierre attended to his companion as best he could, giving him food and water until his supply was completely exhausted. They did not dare to talk above a whisper, for fear of inviting shells from the artillery in the rear of the two lines or missiles from the trench mortars. Nevertheless, Pierre managed to reassure his blind fellow prisoner with whispered words of cheer.

"You are kind," said the stranger gratefully, "though your voice shows that you belong to the other side."

With the advent of night, Pierre planned to complete his journey to the friendly lines. Two things bothered him, however. One was the difficulty of acquainting his countrymen before it was too late that he was really a friend; the other was the thought of leaving his blind companion. The vigil of the day had brought the two, enemies though they were, close together. Pierre simply could not abandon his companion. He clawed and hitched his way to the top of the shell hole and gazed in the direction of the trenches which his countrymen held. Then he riveted his eyes on the scarcely perceptible movement of two bodies but a short distance away. They were either spies returning to the enemy's lines or his own people out reconnoitering. Foot by foot, they advanced toward the shell hole. Pierre remained where he was, undecided whether or not to retreat. He finally resolved to hold his ground and await their coming. When they were but a

few feet away, Pierre spoke in his native tongue: "I am a friend."

"Why are you here?" came the question in the same language.

"I seek shelter within your lines." The man nearest him



Foot by foot, they advanced toward the shell hole.

drew a revolver. "Do not move while I advance, or I shall fire." Pierre remained rigid, as the two traversed the short intervening stretch.

"You wear the uniform of the enemy," said the spokesman of the two, with a menacing question in his subdued voice.

With as few words as possible, Pierre explained.

"What you say may be true, but how can we tell?"

"I am unarmed. I am wounded. Would such a person go spying about?"

"What do you think, Antoine?" the first man asked his companion.

"The fellow's tale is plausible. He can do no harm, if he comes with us. Should he prove to be other than he represents himself to be, we shall soon find out and hold him a prisoner."

"Come, then."

"There is another down in the shell hole," announced Pierre. "He is one of the enemy, but he is blind and wounded. Couldn't we take him with us?"

"A trick!" exclaimed one of the scouts turning to the other.

"You can bind me hand and foot," offered Pierre, "and one of you can stand guard over me, while the other goes below to investigate."

"I believe the boy," asserted the more silent one of the two. "I will go down into the hole myself." He returned shortly. "What the boy says is true," he informed his companion. "Come, help me carry the poor fellow up."

They performed the task so quietly that Pierre, close as he was, could scarcely hear them. When they reached the top, they paused. "You two carry him," urged Pierre. "I will try to crawl after you. Let them know that I am coming."

"You're a brave and generous boy," commended one of his unknown countrymen. "Have no fear. We shall be on the watch for you." The two started back toward their lines, bearing the wounded enemy. Pierre followed. With each foot that he advanced, the torture became greater. Gritting

his teeth, he forced himself ahead, until finally the effort became too great, and he fell upon the ground, unconscious.

When Pierre came to, he was lying on a little white cot in a large room. By his bedside sat an old man. "Grandfather," murmured Pierre, faintly and unbelievably.

The aged visitor patted the white hand of the patient. "Hush," he said softly, "let me do the talking. Those fellows went back after you and brought you in. Your leg's going to be all right in time. The general got wind of what you'd done and saw to it personally that you had the best of care."

"But how did you get here?" Pierre asked.

The old man smiled as he recalled how he had outwitted the enemy. "Easiest thing in the world. Just as soon as I was sure that they had discovered our secret, I left a note at the foot of the pine in the Circle, telling you that I was going to make for the other side. Then I simply went around the end of their lines. Knowing the short cuts as well as I do, it wasn't hard. And I've been hanging around here ever since, trying to get word of you."

The wounded boy realized now that Stegler had actually discovered the note and, imitating the handwriting on it, left a forged one in the same hiding place.

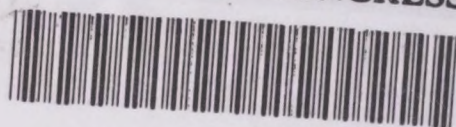
"See what we have here," continued his grandfather jocosely, as he fumbled with the clasp of a military medal that lay pinned to Pierre's coverlet. "The general placed it there himself."

"Where is the blind man who—" began Pierre, but his grandfather cut him short. "The general is going to send him home to his family as a special favor to you."

"God bless the general," whispered Pierre, tears welling into his eyes.

The old man took Pierre's hand. "And God bless the boy who saved his country," he added in a choked voice.

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